

TO: Public Health and Human Services Appropriations Subcommittee

FROM: Twila Costigan, MSF/APA

DATE: January 28, 2007

RE: CFSD Budget Hearing

I first want to thank you for your hard work as members of this committee. I have witnessed your dedication and I appreciate it.

The Child Welfare System that ensures the safety of children who have been abused and neglected is based upon family foster care. Becoming a licensed foster home is not easy...remaining a foster home demands patience, perseverance, and no small amount of intestinal fortitude. Research tells us it takes about 2 years for a person to think about becoming a foster or adoptive parent until the time they pick up phone to inquire. Most call because they know someone who has had a positive experience in foster care or adoption and they feel they have something to give. To become a foster or adoptive parent you must become a fish in a fish bowl. Applicants are asked to share everything from their most intimate moments to their finances. There's paperwork, fingerprints, training, home visits and then...if you're lucky approval. Foster parents are asked about and assessed regarding what type of behaviors they can deal with, what ages, girl or boy, short term or long term care...etc. When the call from the social worker comes requests and assessments often go out the window with the emergent situation. What is intended to be "short term" becomes 6-8-12-18 months...maybe even permanent through adoption. The issues of the child and their birth family impact a foster and adoptive family in such a way that they will never be the same. The foster or adoptive family is changed forever...sometimes this is good... sometimes it is not so good.

Foster families are asked to be patient. Patient with the child they are caring for, patient with their birth family, patient with the new social worker, patient with the therapists, patient with the Court process that includes the CASA, attorneys and judges, patient with the CFSD system that sometimes is able to support the family and sometimes is not. In my experience the majority of foster parents are very patient. Sometimes so much so that they sacrifice their families by taking children who do not fit into their family because they like their social worker and the child has no other safe place to be. Sometimes, if that placement doesn't work out and they have to ask for the child to be removed, foster parents live with the fear that they will never have another child placed with them and all the patience and love they have to share will be lost.

Foster families are asked to persevere...just hang in there until we can figure out the transportation issue so you don't have to take off work...just hang in there until we can find a good therapist, just hang in there until we can set a visit that works with your schedule, just hang in there until we can work out the issues between the professionals...differing opinions about the needs of the child, of the birth parents. Opinions of the therapists, of the school personnel, of the CASA, of the judge, of the social workers, just hang in there until we can find

the time to get that clothing or transportation allowance into our computer system...just hang in there until I can find time to return your call, just hang in there.

Foster parents are gutsy folk. They make a decision to share parenting with a State Agency, a Court System and birth families. They have all the responsibilities of parenting someone else's child day to day, but many are not part of the team and have little ability to influence the decisions about what is best for a child who becomes one of their own. They open their home and their hearts to every human emotion and resultant behavior...be they anger and destruction or joy and laughter, or sadness and tears.

Thus the dichotomy of foster parenting...there simply have to be more good days than bad for the patient, perseverant gutsy foster parent. Most can deal with the child and the birth family. Some must learn to endure the decisions of the Court. What foster parents can't endure is a social worker and an agency that is not consistently supportive of them. I believe this is the reason most choose not to remain foster parents.

CFSD has asked for 20 additional social workers. If you were to fight for this budget item I believe there will be several positive outcomes for foster parents.

1. The number one complaint of foster parents is that social workers do not call them back...more social workers means more call backs, means more support of foster parents, means more foster parents are retained.
2. Foster parents feel social workers need to know the child better...more social workers means more contact with the child, their birth parents and their foster parents.
3. Foster parents want to be part of the team...more social workers means more knowledge of the situation, more ability to include the foster parents, more time to listen to the concerns of the foster family, better outcomes for children.
4. Foster parents need to feel supported...more social workers means not only more time to include foster parents as part of the team so they feel valued, but enough time to get those support services like clothing and transportation allowances to foster parents in a timely manner

Please remember that the best foster or adoptive parent recruitment technique is a content foster or adoptive parent. It is crucial to the outcomes of the Child and Family Services Division that foster parents feel supported and valued by the agency staff they work with.

I urge you to approve the additional FTE's, the adoption subsidies the 2.5% rate increase, the foster parent liability insurance Bill. I implore you to find every possible source of funds and use them to support the work of the Child and Family Services Division and the work of the foundation of the Child Welfare System...foster and adoptive parents.

Thank you for being Champions for Children in this 2007 Legislative Session!

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